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ABSTRACT

A 3-year study described older-than-average full-time students at the University of North Dakota and compared them to traditional-age students on that campus and to their older-than-average counterparts nationally. From a sample of 100 students in each of 6 categories (young adult, adult, undergraduate, graduate, and professional), 69% responded. The study's findings included the following: (1) older-than-average students spent more hours than traditional-age students working at outside jobs and domestic responsibilities; (2) although most traditional-age students attend college so they can take on a first career, older than average students attend because they are changing careers or to gain new skills and knowledge to be used in their present careers; (3) there are no differences in preferred instructional styles attributable to the different ages of the students; (4) students prefer instructional approaches showing how they will use the knowledge or skill they are learning; (5) older-than-average students and traditional-age students are roughly in agreement about what constitutes good versus bad teaching; (6) lack of time to balance home, work, and family is a greater obstacle to older-than-average students than to traditional-age students; (7) college, not age, provided the differences in perceived strengths and weaknesses in students; (8) traditional-age students prefer that instructors' assessments tell not only how well they did on a task, but also how they are doing relative to peers, whereas older-than-average students favor feedback that assesses their skill and growth as individuals and provides useful standards. The study makes several recommendations to faculty and institutions involved in teaching adult learners. (Appendix A describes the study methodology and appendix B contains the survey instrument and letters to respondents. There are 86 references.) (CML)

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